

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales
Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and
Education Committee

Blaenoriaethau ar gyfer y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg |
Priorities for the Children, Young People and Education Committee

CYPE 61

Ymateb gan : Cymorth Cymru

Response from : Cymorth Cymru

Question 1 – Within the remit set out above: what do you consider to be the priorities or issues that the Children, Young People and Education Committee should consider during the Fifth Assembly?

Every child in Wales deserves the opportunity to achieve their potential. However, it seems many children in Wales are unable to do so. A recent study by the Bevan Foundation has shown that 29% of children in Wales live in households with incomes of less than 60% of the contemporary median, after housing costs – some 200,000 children. We believe this committee should therefore undertake a comprehensive examination of child poverty in Wales, and consider how the policy systems we have set up are helping reduce that poverty – or not.

Part of Our Programme for Children and Young People is that a child should ‘have a safe home and a community which supports physical and emotional wellbeing’.¹ Despite this, there are still young people and children who do not have a stable home due to issues such as mental health, abuse and neglect either experienced themselves or by their families. As a cause of the lack of stability, children are less likely to excel in school, and experience other detrimental effects later in life. These adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) have been shown to be linked to negative outcomes such as increased chance of incarceration, poor mental health, and more.² The report into ACEs shows the importance of early intervention, and programmes such as Supporting People (among others) are a vital part of the mix of interventions. We hope that the committee can look into how services across Wales are coordinating their preventative activity

and targeting it to reduce these adverse experiences. Getting this right means less funding allocated later in an adult's life – but more importantly, it means the child will be happier and healthier sooner.

One of the main priorities of the Fifth Assembly should be to provide all children and young people with a stable home so they are able to focus on their education. We appreciate the difficulties in presenting an accurate picture of the issue due to limitations of available data; however, reports carried out in 2013/14 indicated that a total of 83,000 young people were in touch with homelessness services in the UK. ³ In recent times it seems the overall number of young people experiencing homelessness has not significantly reduced.

A research paper published by Cambridge University and Centrepoint estimates that during 2013–14 in Wales, 1,022 under 25s non–statutory homeless entered accommodation, in addition to the 1,758 statutory homeless households records.⁴

Although it is essential to look at preventative strategies and examine the factors that are placing households at risk of homelessness before they reach crisis point. Many children are currently at that crisis point and are in desperate need of support. One way in which children are being supported is through schemes run by local Welsh charities and organisations. Organisations like Solas Cymru and Coedlys are offering support services to children and young people so they are able to fulfil their ambitions. For example, Coedlys helped one young lady achieve her ambition of attending University by offering her a tenancy whilst assisting her in overcoming substance misuse.

Organisations such as these would not be able to offer such services without funding from the 'Supporting People' budget. This budget which was cut in the year 2015/16 has been pivotal in funding effective projects across Wales. To ensure protection for this vital source of funding, a campaign is being run by Cymorth Cymru and Community Housing Cymru to protect the budget during the next financial year 2017/18.

We would also request the committee to consider how a young person's journey is supported by statutory services and the third sector. This 'journey' through the eyes of young people themselves would show where potential pitfalls lie, but also show where and when families find themselves most supported. We hope the committee can gather a wide range of evidence as to what works with children and young people to ensure all are given a fair start in life.

Linked to this is the need to ensure that services are commissioned in an effective and joined-up way. In our responses to other committees we have asked for housing to be given an equal status with other policy areas. For example, a great deal of focus has been given to integrating health and social care. But housing often deals with problems amongst families at a very early stage, and has access to information that other areas do not have (rent arrears as an early indication of mental health problems, for example). In order to make family life in Wales positive for all families, to help people overcome challenges and to give everyone that fair start in life, housing needs to be involved at all levels.

In terms of effective commissioning, we believe there should be a concerted effort across Welsh Government policy areas to review and renew commissioning processes and approaches. There is good practice across Wales, but also some very poor practice which can treat services that work with vulnerable people no differently than other procured products such as food and beverages, stationery, and similar.

Wales is a small nation, but one which could, with the right effort and time, be very well coordinated. Coordinating across policy areas and integrating services is the only way we will be able to deliver quality services in Wales for long into the future.

Question 2 – From the list of priorities or issues you have identified, what do you consider to be the key areas that should be considered during the next 12 months (please identify up to three areas or issues)? Please outline why these should be considered as key priorities.

1) Joined-up responses to new legislation

In order to progress in their self-development and education, children and young people need stability. Those who find themselves rough sleeping or homeless are being denied the opportunity to develop themselves as a person and to contribute to society. It is not just about homelessness of course, it is the whole range of services that enable a child or young person to get the help and support they need. Currently, we are concerned as an organisation that these interventions are not always joined-up.

We believe a way this can be overcome is by encouraging collaboration between services operating under the Housing (Wales) Act, Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act and Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act. We have stressed the importance of this collaborative effort to all committees we have formally responded to. There is a risk that local authorities could start designing services that work well in meeting one of the Acts, but may not be joined up to meet the others.

Finally, as part of this joining-up of legislation, it is important to draw attention to the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. This Act has the potential to be an excellent way of leveraging good partnership working between sectors that do not traditionally work together. It can do this by encouraging organisations to work towards the indicators proposed by the Act. At this stage, there is a risk that implementation of this Act means it does not have as significant an impact as it could. We hope that the committee will consider this area as a priority. Any Act that can

bring education to work with housing, health and care for example, can only be a positive.

2) Secure funding for the Supporting People Budget

As discussed in response to Question 1, the importance of the Supporting People budget cannot be overlooked. It is because of this grant that 3/4 of a million lives have been transformed in Wales.⁵ The direct human impact of the programme makes it one of the most important sources of funding in Wales.

3) Integration of housing with health and care

As mentioned above, this is growing in importance. As health and care continue to work more closely together, housing runs the risk of being inadvertently left on the sidelines. Given the importance of stable housing to the health, education and wellbeing of young people, it should be seen as a fundamental part of the mix with health and care. We would want the committee to look into how this could benefit the work to support children, young people and their families better.

¹ <http://gov.wales/topics/people-and-communities/people/children-and-young-people/rights/implementation-of-childrens-rights/?lang=en>

² [http://www2.nphs.wales.nhs.uk:8080/PRIDDocs.nsf/7c21215d6d0c613e80256f490030c05a/d488a3852491bc1d80257f370038919e/\\$FILE/ACE%20Report%20FINAL%20\(E\).pdf](http://www2.nphs.wales.nhs.uk:8080/PRIDDocs.nsf/7c21215d6d0c613e80256f490030c05a/d488a3852491bc1d80257f370038919e/$FILE/ACE%20Report%20FINAL%20(E).pdf)

³ <https://www.ovoenergy.com/binaries/content/assets/documents/pdfs/youthhomelessnessbriefing.pdf>

⁴ <http://centrepnt.org.uk/media/1522377/Cambridge%20full%20report%20-%20scale%20of%20youth%20homelessness.pdf>

⁵ http://chcymru.org.uk/uploads/general/Where_we_are_now_July_2016_FINAL.pdf